

## **Briefing Paper: National OHV Strategy**

### **Subject:**

The growing issue of off-highway vehicle (OHV) management on the public lands has created a significant challenge for our agency. In response, the BLM is developing a national strategy for the OHV program. Increased numbers of OHVs, existing and potential environmental impact in urban and rural areas and increasing legal challenges are among the reasons for BLM's collective look at OHV management across the West. Development of this strategy will involve the public at the onset, including individuals, interest groups, Resource Advisory Councils (RACs), and State and local governments. The public can be involved in three ways: through an OHV mailer, BLM's national web-site at [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov) or during a series of listening meetings held in the western States and in Washington DC. The meetings locations and dates will be announced through local news releases. Public comment will be accepted through August 31, 2000.

BLM will be soliciting solutions and ideas from the public regarding key issue areas, and will incorporate that information into guidance that will be available for field offices to use in November. The expectation is that this collaborative effort will assist our agency in taking the steps necessary to address the concerns regarding local OHV management on public lands through the land use planning process and in day-to-day management as applicable. BLM intends to ensure environmentally responsible off-highway vehicle use on BLM-managed public lands.

### **BLM Position:**

A news release and initial direction outlining the development of a national strategy regarding management of BLM's OHV program was issued January 10, 2000. The goal of the strategy is to improve the overall management of OHV use on the public lands, which has increased dramatically over the last several years. The strategy will serve as a framework for reviewing and addressing issues including but not limited to executive orders, regulations, manuals, current BLM OHV designations, trends in management and management approaches, route inventory needs, resource issues, special management and sensitive areas and resources, monitoring, education, law enforcement and budget. With limited funding and workforce, BLM's resources are best directed towards on the ground efforts rather than spending scarce funding on litigation, protests, appeals, and FOIA requests.

In order to meet our goal of improving OHV management, a series of steps will be taken over the next few months. A national OHV team has been assembled to help guide the process, produce communication materials and prepare guidance based on public comment. During the summer of 2000, public input will be collected. To help focus respondents in providing solution-oriented comments and suggestions, the national web-site and a mailer will be available for public comment, based on a set of key issue areas. All public comments collected will be analyzed and organized, and used in the development of guidance to field offices. Finally, any needed guidance for the BLM OHV program will be issued to field offices on November 30, 2000.

**Background:**

The BLM is developing its national strategy in response to the convergence of several factors that have made OHV use a more pressing issue in the West, where the region's rapid growth and changing demographics are affecting public land resources. Off-highway vehicles and other forms of transportation – sport utility vehicles, motorcycles, and mountain bikes – are more popular than ever before. Much of this use is occurring on BLM-managed lands that, as a result of urban and suburban growth, are nearby or even adjacent to numerous communities and subdivisions. These communities are both convenient to and affected by activities on BLM lands, adding to the complexity of the Bureau's land-management decisions.

Moreover, OHV use is taking place on land designated by the BLM as "open" to cross-country travel based on land use plans that the Bureau developed in the 1970s and 1980s, when OHV use was comparatively low. Many of these land use plans are outdated, not only because of increased OHV use, but also due to concerns regarding threatened and endangered species, soils and watershed, wildlife habitat and/or visual resources found on BLM lands. The BLM's budget related resources – including the number of recreation specialists and law enforcement personnel have not kept pace with the past decade's growth in recreational and other uses of public land.

As statewide and regional efforts to address OHV management are underway in states such as Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Utah, Idaho and California, need for consistent and up-to-date guidance has been realized, using the lessons learned from all locations which can be applied across the West.

**Position of Major Constituents:**

In the past several months interest groups have raised the awareness of off-highway vehicle use on public lands. For some interest groups, OHV management is viewed as their top priority to address. Some of their interest focuses on OHV use and designations on public lands, including sensitive and special management areas. Other interest groups are concerned with the increasing number of OHV closures or restrictions placed on public land areas. Continued access to public lands, education and responsible use, maintenance of existing roads and trails, and the development of recreational trails systems are among their concerns.

Producing a national strategy with the involvement of key members of OHV advocacy and recreation groups, environmental and conservation groups, county, state and federal partners and others will help the BLM direct its attention and limited resources toward more effective management of this program. There will likely be high interest from groups with varying perspectives who will participate in such an effort. The support and leadership of management in developing a National OHV Management Strategy is critical to focus the agency, staff and resources on key issues, problems and areas.

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